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- Today's Insider (PDF)



YOU DON'T SAY...

"Because of the Great Recession, which was a wonderful blessing to the state of North Carolina, we have tried to look and we have been forced to look at other issues other than just putting additional money into situations to solve problems."

Rep. Jimmy Dixon, R-Duplin, during a discussion of budget cuts at the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality.

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News Summary

Sexual Harassment Policies

As awareness of sexual harassment issues in politics grows, state government agencies are taking a look at their policies to see if they're comprehensive enough. North Carolina's Office of State Human Resources has an "unlawful workplace harassment" policy that many state agencies abide by, but some are reaching out to their employees to see if anything needs to be changed.

In late November, Superintendent of Public Instruction Mark Johnson sent out an email to superintendents and principals, as well as his colleagues, concerning the Department of Instruction's sexual harassment policy. In his email he said: "While our nation is engaged in an ongoing conversation about sexual harassment, I want to reiterate that unwelcomed and unsolicited sexual speech or conduct is strictly prohibited at NCDPI and will not be tolerated. At my direction, my Chief Legal Counsel and DPI's Human Resources Director have reviewed DPI's current sexual harassment policies, and we believe the existing policies could be better written so that DPI personnel have clear guidance on how to report issues."

His email continues: "We are working with DPI's HR office to update the unlawful workplace harassment policy and prevention plan to better clarify the process for employees seeking to report issues. ... It is important that we continue to work together to create an environment at DPI that serves as an example for our districts, educators, and students throughout North Carolina. A safe and healthy environment for all employees enables all of us to perform at our best."

DPI isn't the only agency taking a proactive look at its policies. Ford Porter, spokesman for Gov. Roy Cooper, said the governor has "directed the Office of State Human Resources to review policies currently in place regarding workplace harassment and develop further strategies to prevent harassment in state offices." "The recent stories of workplace harassment across the nation have been alarming and every employer should take steps to prevent unprofessional behavior and ensure that people feel comfortable at work," Porter said. "Agencies review policies during orientation, and training opportunities are available to employees on how to prevent and report workplace harassment, including sexual harassment."

Some of the agencies -- like the lieutenant governor's office, the Department of Labor and the Department of Insurance -- don't have an additional workplace harassment protocol beyond the OSHR's unlawful workplace harassment policy. Others are thinking about having additional policies to supplement the OSHR policy. Laura Brewer, spokeswoman for the Department of Justice, said "[s]exual harassment has no place at the Department of Justice," as outlined in the OSHR policy, but "we are currently reviewing this policy and considering adding an additional, DOJ-specific policy to strengthen sexual harassment protections."

The Office of the State Auditor and Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services have their own additional policies. A spokesperson for the Office of the State Auditor said the sexual harassment policy is reviewed annually, toward the end of the year. The last update was on Dec. 22, 2016. The Department of State Treasurer is also in the process of updating its policies.

The Department of the Secretary of State also uses the OSHR policy, but then adds specific information relating to the department. A spokesperson for the department said the human resources director is reviewing the policies, and that the department also does an annual review of the department's equal employment opportunity plan. (Lauren Horsch, THE INSIDER, 12/13/17)

Judicial Reform Committee

Republican senators faced criticism on social media Tuesday when a committee meeting on proposed judicial changes was moved to a smaller room. The Senate Select Committee on Judicial Reform and Redistricting -- scheduled to meet at 1 p.m. today -- has been meeting in one of the large committee hearing rooms in the Legislative Office Building. But this week, those two rooms have other committees already scheduled for 1 p.m., so the location was changed to Legislative Building Room 1124/1224, which isn't wired to stream media audio online.

"The people of NC deserve a transparent process," Senate Minority Leader Dan Blue said on Twitter. "I have to wonder what our Republican colleagues are hiding." Melissa Price Kromm, director of N.C. Voters for Clean Elections, tweeted that "the #ncga is embarking on the biggest challenge of our judiciary in over 50 years done in secret, behind closed doors, and without public input and in a room with no audio."

Asked about the meeting location, Shelly Carver, a spokeswoman for Senate leader Phil Berger, said "there were no other rooms with streaming audio capabilities available." The agenda for the meeting hadn't been posted by late Tuesday afternoon, but a committee chair said during last week's meeting that discussion of potential constitutional problems with the House judicial redistricting plan would continue. Legal experts recently told senators that some of the districts in the House plan, sponsored by Rep. Justin Burr, R-Stanly, could pose constitutional issues because of population differences between districts as well as residency requirements. Similar problems exist in current districts, they said.

Last week, legislative staff provided maps showing the districts that could feature those problems. The House's District Court maps have potential problems with population numbers in districts covering Wake, Durham, Cumberland and Buncombe counties, while districts covering about a third of the state's counties have issues with residency requirements. For the Superior Court maps in the House bill, Mecklenburg and Buncombe districts have "potentially problematic population deviation," while 22 counties have "potentially problematic" residency requirements. (Colin Campbell, THE INSIDER, 12/13/17)

Gerrymandering Decision

Legislative defendants in North Carolina's racial gerrymandering case want a three-judge panel to keep next year's elections on track by promptly making its final ruling and holding a key hearing two weeks sooner than currently scheduled. Raleigh lawyer Phillip Strach said in a court filing Tuesday that the panel from the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina should issue its final ruling no later than Jan. 10 -- the date that the General Assembly next reconvenes in the state capital. "Doing so will protect the state's ability to seek meaningful Supreme Court review and take additional legislative action if necessary," Strach said in the written motion. Strach said that if the judges delay their final ruling, it could interfere with the candidate filing period for state House and Senate offices slated to begin in two months.

"The state has already notified the court that new plans would need to be in place by Dec. 15, 2017, to allow sufficient time for review by the court and implementation before the currently scheduled filing period," Strach said. Strach represents state Senate Leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, state House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, state Rep. David Lewis, R-Harnett, and former state Sen. Robert Rucho, R-Mecklenburg, in the lawsuit that overturned legislative maps the GOP-led legislature had approved six years ago after the last U.S. Census.

In a separate legal document filed Monday, Strach faulted both Persily and the three-judge panel for what he characterized as a recommended redistricting plan in search of problems to fix. The legislators' lawyer asserted that in announcing a special master would be needed and then hiring Persily for the job, the judges did not state clearly what was wrong with the so-called "2017 plan" that the General Assembly adopted in August. "The special master's version of each of the challenged districts is not meaningfully different from the enacted 2017 version of those districts except in two ways: The special master's districts systematically reduce black voting age population in each district and favor Democrats," Strach said. Strach alleged that in drawing the revised districts, Persily focused too heavily on racial demographics, whereas the legislative defendants' attorney contended that the General Assembly did not consider race at all in developing its substitute plan this summer.

In the Dec. 1 report containing his final recommendations, Persily wrote that he applied generally accepted principles of unbiased redistricting in revising the districts and pointed out steps he took to be sure he wasn't favoring one political party over the other. Meanwhile, lawyers for the voters who filed the suit generally have praised Persily's handiwork, although they have yet to submit a formal critique of Persily's recommended plan. (Taft Wireback, GREENSBORO NEWS & RECORD, 12/12/17)

Environmental Lawsuit

The N.C. Department of Agriculture has not yet spent any of the \$250,000 allocated in this year's state budget to put North Carolina back in a lawsuit challenging clean water regulations enacted under President Barack Obama. The agency provided an update on the lawsuit Tuesday to a legislative oversight committee.

The budget provision came after an April move by Attorney General Josh Stein and Gov. Roy Cooper's administration to withdraw the state from a lawsuit stemming from the "Waters of the United States" rule, which expanded the number of small bodies of water that were subject to the regulations of the Clean Water Act. Then-Rep. Chris Millis, R-Pender, sponsored the budget amendment to rejoin the lawsuit, and he said at the time that the rule amounts to a "federal land grab."

Laura Kilian, legislative liaison for the Department of Agriculture, said none of the \$250,000 has been spent so far. "Currently our in-house counsel is actively monitoring the case between the Supreme Court and the administration," she said. Jeff Cherry, a legislative attorney who advises the oversight committee, explained that the lawsuit is stuck on a jurisdictional question currently before the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, which must determine what court will address lawsuits challenging the clean water regulations. Meanwhile, the Trump administration has said it will overturn the Obama administration's rule. "It's kind of like in the Lord of the Rings when the ents are trying to decide what to do and it takes awhile," Cherry said. (Colin Campbell, THE INSIDER, 12/13/17)

DEQ Cuts

Sheila Holman, assistant secretary for the environment at the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, said Tuesday that the department still needs to identify \$65,140 in budget cuts to be able to meet the required \$828,114 cost reduction this fiscal year. The state budget required the cost reductions, and included another \$1,078,114 reduction for the next fiscal year. The reductions are being done through the department's "Reorganization through Reduction" program.

Holman said the department wanted to have the RTR program "rockin' and rollin'" by Sept. 1, but missed its self-imposed deadline. "We didn't make that, but I think that was due in large part to us being a little naïve about the process and the number of steps we had to go through," she said. There are three plans the department has looked at -- an overall DEQ program, one for the Division of Waste Management, and one for the Division of Energy, Mining and Land Resources. In total, 365 employees are affected by the plan, but only 17 were cut. The department has paid out \$467,956 in severance and \$58,386 in health insurance -- excluding longevity and leave payout totals -- for those jobs.

The affected positions come from department administration, the Division of Coastal Management, Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Services, Division of Energy, Mining and Land Resources, Division of Water Infrastructure and Division of Waste Management. "We have looked very carefully at how to do some fund shifting in certain locations where we're taking receipts positions, or receipts that could support (positions)," Holman said, adding they've also worked to reclassify some positions to find other savings.

DEQ has also proposed a fund shift for five positions in the Division of Marine Fisheries from appropriated funds to receipt funds -- and should know within the next few days if the Office of State Budget and Management approves that shift. The shift would save \$316,553. "Where we are, I think, again if we have approval from OSBM, we're in relatively good shape in achieving the savings for the first year of the biennium," Holman said. "If not, we will be going back to look at another RTR proposal."

However, while DEQ was looking to make these cuts, the GenX water contamination in eastern North Carolina was discovered. "That issue alone helped highlight some of the staff shortages in the Division of Water Resources, and we didn't feel like that particular division could face additional cuts at this time," Holman said. Beyond avoiding cutting staff from that division, Holman said the "reality is other things are going slower" because of prioritizing GenX responses. "Inspections are not getting done as quickly. Permitting isn't getting done as quickly, because we have those key staff working on this issue." (Lauren Horsch, THE INSIDER, 12/13/17)

Cardinal Severance

North Carolina lawmakers on Tuesday urged state officials work to recoup nearly \$4 million in severance to four former top executives of a regional mental health agency, saying having the agency reimburse the state for the payments isn't good enough. The Department of Health and Human Services took temporary control of Cardinal Innovations Healthcare Solutions two weeks ago after recent state audits identified excessive spending, CEO pay well above what state policy allowed and generous payments for departing executives. Cardinal Innovations' former board previously agreed to severance policies so that CEO Richard Topping would receive \$1.7 million when the board fired him last month. Three other executives -- the chief medical officer, chief information officer and chief operations officer -- received \$2.1 million combined from the board when they resigned with Topping, DHHS said.

Department Secretary Dr. Mandy Cohen warned Cardinal leaders before the Nov. 27 takeover that Cardinal would be required to repay the severance from administrative funds, not from those for providing services. Cohen told a legislative oversight committee Tuesday that DHHS and Cardinal's interim CEO were working on a plan by next July to earmark the repaid administrative funds to help Cardinal patients in the 20-county area it serves. But several committee members asked or urged Cohen to recoup the \$3.8 million directly from the severance recipients.

"If this were a private business and folks recognized there was a problem we wouldn't sit for several months while those millions of dollars are in the hands of private individuals before taking action," said Sen. Dan Bishop, R-Mecklenburg. "I would urge that the department be aggressive about that and act to the full extent of its power."

Rep. Nelson Dollar, R-Wake, also said every effort should be made to recover the money "from people who got golden, gilded parachutes" with taxpayer money. Cardinal receives hundreds of millions of dollars in federal and state funds annually to help the mentally ill, substance abusers and people with disabilities. Cohen said department lawyers are looking at what legal options the state has to recoup the severance. She also suggested DHHS needs to find a balance between meting out punishment and working with Cardinal administrators to develop a culture that quickly addresses fiscal noncompliance with state rules. Cohen already has dismantled the board. "We do want to make sure we look back and hold folks accountable, but very much (we) also need to look forward," Cohen said. She also defended DHHS for taking charge of Cardinal until after the severance was paid,

saying the agency wanted to make sure its takeover plan was legally sound. (Gary D. Robertson, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 12/12/17)

New State Forest

Legislators got an update Tuesday on the new Mountain Island Educational State Forest, a 2,000-acre property in Gaston and Lincoln counties near Lowesville. The facility received a \$3.2 million allocation in this year's state budget, much of which will go toward a welcome center that will include a classroom and exhibit hall. The goal is to "provide a unique outdoor experience with exhibits and classes designed to educate schoolchildren" and the general public, said Laura Kilian, legislative liaison for the N.C. Department of Agriculture. She said it can also serve as a joint use facility for the Forest Service and Department of Agriculture and can be an incident command post for the Charlotte area. Project planners will meet with design firms in January and select one, at which point a timeline for construction can be established. For now, the forest is only open by appointment. (Colin Campbell, THE INSIDER, 12/13/17)

Prison Changes

Changes are coming to North Carolina's prisons following five fatal assaults on prison workers and a Charlotte Observer investigation highlighting widespread dangers and corruption. Among other measures, the state says it is building fences, buying batons and frisking employees. It is also installing new equipment to detect cellphones, which inmates have used to plot crimes and orchestrate attacks. Meanwhile, a new Duke University study confirms much of what the Observer found in its June investigation, and recommends that the state take additional steps to improve prison staffing and security.

"We're continuing to work to identify proven safety and security practices we can implement to make North Carolina's prisons safer, with many improvements already put in place," Public Safety Secretary Erik Hooks said. Rep. Bob Steinburg, R-Chowan, who serves on a legislative committee that oversees the prisons, said state leaders do not appear to be addressing one of the officers' key concerns: Many feel they are getting no respect or support from their supervisors. "They're not getting at the heart of the problem," said Steinburg, a Republican from eastern North Carolina. "They don't get it."

The study -- conducted by Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy -- was released last week. Among the recommendations:

- Increase hiring by forming recruitment committees at each prison and offering referral and signing bonuses. The Duke study found that North Carolina's officer vacancy rate -- about 17 percent -- exceeded the rates of five other states that provided data.
- Extend training for new hires. Basic training for officers in North Carolina lasts four weeks, shorter than most of the seven other states that Duke surveyed. Other law enforcement officers in North Carolina get 16 weeks of training, the study noted.
- Enhance screening for contraband by using dogs, cellphone-detection technology, and random searches. "Staff should be heavily scrutinized at higher-security facilities, where they provide the main channel for contraband introduction," the report states.
- Hire an outside agency to study officer salaries. Despite recent pay increases approved by the legislature, pay for officers in the state's maximum-security prisons remains about \$8,000 less than the national average, the Observer found.

Pamela Walker, a spokeswoman for DPS, said prison officials would consider all of the study's recommendations -- some of which may require legislative action or additional funding. Walker said prison officials were already taking some of the recommended steps, such as increasing their use of contraband-detecting dogs and technology. (Gavin Off and Ames Alexander, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, 12/12/17)

Enrollment Extension

North Carolina's governor is asking the federal government to extend the enrollment period for Affordable Care Act insurance. The state is among 39 served by the federal HealthCare.gov website, and the deadline for signups on the site is Friday. Most states that run their own health insurance websites have later deadlines. Gov. Roy Cooper sent a letter this week to the federal Department of Health and Human Services saying a one-week extension until Dec. 22 would benefit people around the country. The Democratic governor said North Carolina has the third-highest enrollment on the federal marketplace, but he fears enrollment could be hurt by a shorter signup period this year. More than 500,000 North Carolina residents signed up on the site last year. Cooper said about 210,000 had enrolled for 2018 by Dec. 2. (THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 12/12/17)

Mental Care

The \$2.5 million behavioral health zone, funded by an anonymous donor, is UNC Rex Healthcare's attempt to keep mentally ill patients out of emergency rooms. The facility allows patients to be quickly moved from the ER and into sunlit, private rooms until space becomes available at a psychiatric hospital or they are stable enough to go home. Rex officials provided a tour of the facility Tuesday, demonstrating features such as the virtually indestructible metal soap dispensers, and airtight paper towel dispensers that won't burn if deliberately set on fire. The safety features are based on best practices recommended by consultants and also used in psychiatric hospitals. The facility is undergoing finishing touches and will be ready for patients this month. The eight individual rooms are bathed in natural lighting, offset in gentle green and blue hues that are believed to induce a calming effect, said Jennifer Sollami, Rex's emergency department manager. A common area is available for socializing, playing games and relaxing. She said it's the first facility of its type in the state, and several other hospitals are now planning their own.

Because of a shortage of psychiatric facilities, mentally ill patients often end up in hospital emergency rooms when they are suicidal, homicidal, psychotic or otherwise unstable. They arrive in police cars, in ambulances and on their own seeking help. For years they've been shunted to hospital ERs, confined to a bed or a chair in a narrow stall behind a sliding curtain. In the noisy, chaotic ER setting, behavioral patients compete for doctors and beds with conventional emergency cases, such as heart attacks, strokes and accident victims. Statewide, behavioral patients last year waited an average of five days in a hospital to gain admittance to a state mental health facility, and 2.5 days to get into a private facility that typically only accepts patients with health insurance. At Rex, mentally ill patients wait an average of 30 hours -- though some wait longer than a week -- for a slot to become available at a psychiatric hospital. (John Murawski, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 12/12/17)

Indicted

Four people have been indicted in the case involving \$2.3 million missing from the Wake County Register of Deeds office, including the former register of deeds. A grand jury handed up indictments Tuesday against current and former staff of the county office. Laura Riddick is charged with six counts of embezzlement over \$100,000. Murray M. Parker, Troy Ellis and Veronica Gearon also face embezzlement charges. The state also placed a \$700,000 property bond on Riddick's home in Raleigh as part of a pre-trial release.

Riddick held the office from 1996 until her resignation earlier this year at the start of an SBI investigation. The Republican was elected to six terms in all. The State Bureau of Investigation probe began in March after an internal audit ordered on Feb. 3 by top Wake County officials revealed hundreds of thousands of dollars missing. By the end of the probe, investigators determined that at least \$2.3 million could not be accounted for in an office that takes in about \$14 million a year, a large portion of which is cash. The Register of Deeds' office records legal documents and maps, issues marriage licenses and vital records certificates, certifies documents and administers notary-public oaths. (Anne Blythe and Paul A. Specht, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 12/12/17)

Charter Advisory Board

On Monday, the Charter School Advisory Board (CSAB) gave four schools of the six schools under review a "ready to open" status, recommending the State Board of Education approve their plans.

Two of those schools will open in 2018, on an accelerated track, if approved by the state board in January. Two schools were trying to change from a private to a charter school. One succeeded: Mountain Island Day School in Mecklenburg County, and one failed: Hobgood Academy Charter School in Halifax County. Achievement Charter Academy in Harnett County, which includes a daycare and small private school, did not meet the technical requirements for conversion but was similarly already existing as a tuition-based school. It also failed to gain the board's approval.

Board chair Alex Quigley expressed concerns that these conversions were straying from the point of charter schools, saying he wanted to make sure the schools were innovative and offering something unique to their students. "I don't want private schools to feel like this is a way out the back door -- to become a charter school," Quigley said. "I think there's another level and layer of scrutiny that should be applied." Throughout discussions, CSAB members stressed the importance of data-based enrollment projections, free transportation and school lunch, fiscal soundness, community involvement and awareness, board members' experience, and specific, strong goals. (Liz Bell, EDUCATION NC, 12/12/17)

Water Treatment

While Brunswick County Public Utilities and other utility providers in the area continue to test for the presence of GenX and other chemicals in the water, Brunswick County will explore water treatment options for its Northwest Water Treatment Plant. John Nichols, the county's director of public utilities, said the county already plans to expand the Leland-area plant from 24 million gallons per day to 36 million gallons per day and, with the chemical GenX discovered in the Cape Fear River, decided to also look at other treatment methodologies. Current treatment processes at the plant cannot filter out the substance. Nichols said utilities staff recently advertised a "request for proposals" for engineering to determine the "best treatment methodologies to implement at the Northwest plant."

Proposals have to be submitted by Jan. 5, 2018, after which a firm will be selected to complete the study. A draft study including treatment options and cost estimates will be presented to commissioners by March 19, 2018, and a final report will be presented in April. The proposed plan includes selecting a water treatment method, followed by the plant expansion, scheduled to commence in 2020. The Cape Fear Public Utility Authority is also looking into water treatment options for its Sweeney Water Treatment Plant. (Makenzie Holland, WILMINGTON STAR-NEWS, 12/12/17)

Lawmaker Visit

North Carolina Reps. Rena Turner, R-Iredell, and John Fraley, R-Iredell, dropped in at Statesville's Central Elementary School, where they encouraged fourth-graders to educate themselves on the issues facing their community. "There's absolutely nothing you can't do if you continue to ask questions and work hard," said Fraley. Fraley and Turner are both Statesville natives. During Tuesday's visit they spoke about their backgrounds -- Turner in business and Fraley in education and the court system. Students' questions during the session in Central's library included: "How long does it take to drive to Raleigh?" And "When you were in fourth grade, what did you want to be when you grew up?"

Turner and Fraley took time after the visit to address concerns raised by Iredell-Statesville Schools officials about General Assembly-mandated reductions in kindergarten-through-third-grade classrooms that were supposed to go into effect during the current school year but, for now, are delayed until 2018-19. I-SS would need an additional 62 teachers to meet the requirements, Associate Superintendent Alvera Lesane said at the district's annual legislative breakfast last week. The House has passed multiple bills to ease the class-size reductions, but not the Senate, Fraley said. "It's a goal (class-size reduction) we need to accomplish, but we don't need to hurt at the same time," said Turner. "I would like to keep music and arts in the schools, and do what we can do to make both possible." (Chloe Moores, STATESVILLE RECORD & LANDMARK, 12/12/17)

Cotton Demand

Low cotton prices and a couple of bad weather years have unseated North Carolina as one of the leading cotton-producing states. Traditionally ranked around 3rd or 4th, the state is now 8th in cotton production, according to USDA November projections.

Longtime farmers like David Dunlow of Garysburg, North Carolina, are starting to wonder if it's still worth growing cotton. "It's been that bad because of weather and because of the safety net not being there and prices being depressed," he said. That safety net he's talking about is Title I of the federal Farm Bill. It's a guarantee that the government will pay farmers if they suffer a crop failure or a major drop in prices. Congress took cotton out of Title I of the Farm Bill in 2014. And that left Dunlow without a safety net when rain nearly ruined his crop the following year. That ruined the quality of the crop, and many North Carolina farmers were forced to sell their cotton at half market price. That was a devastating blow since cotton prices have been hovering around 70 cents a pound the past three years. That's a third of what they were in 2011 when they peaked over \$2 a pound.

Farmers can blame Chinese government leaders for that steep drop in prices, according to John Robinson, an agriculture economist at Texas A&M University. "Their response to that \$2 a pound cotton in 2011 was to implement a government program of buying high-priced cotton and tucking it away in a government storage like the U.S. has for petroleum," Robinson said.

At the same time, yoga pants were becoming widely popular in America. This new desire for synthetic athletic wear eroded demand for cotton, according to Robinson. "When these fashion things happen, all of the sudden, there will be a big shift -- in this case inwards -- in the demand for cotton, because it seems like everyone is wearing those tight clingy yoga pants," he said.

But Cotton Incorporated in Cary, North Carolina, thinks it has a solution to the growing popularity of yoga pants. It has designed a new cotton fabric, called TransDRY, that breathes and wicks moisture like its synthetic competitor. "We're making a more performance fabric that's intended for performance use," said Mary Ankeny, vice president of product development at Cotton Inc. "It's intended to be out there to be able to compete with those synthetics options that are on the market." Cotton Inc. is hoping its TransDRY fabric will catch on with yoga pants designers. That would help increase demand for cotton. (James Morrison, WUNC RADIO, 12/12/17)

Media Move

Longtime News & Observer reporter Bruce Siceloff is now working for the state agency he'd written about extensively: The N.C. Department of Transportation. Siceloff started work this week as a temporary communications officer. "We believe his journalism background and knowledge of transportation from his years of covering it for the paper will be a help on a variety of projects within our communications office while we work to fill vacant positions," DOT spokesman Steve Abbott said in an email. Siceloff left the paper last year after decades as a reporter and editor, most recently on the transportation beat. He's spent the past year as a Fulbright Scholar in Montenegro. (Colin Campbell, THE INSIDER, 12/13/17)

Investigation Calls

A North Carolina congressman is joining women in the House in their call for a congressional investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct by President Donald Trump. "President Trump will not silence the voices of the 17 women who have accused him of sexual misconduct," Rep. David Price, a Democrat, wrote on Twitter on Tuesday. Price represents North Carolina's 4th Congressional District, including Orange and parts of Wake and Durham counties, in the U.S. House. Price elaborated further on his Facebook page. "The #MeToo movement has sparked an important conversation in our country about sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying and abuse. Those who are willing to share their story deserve to be heard, regardless of the influence or position of their alleged aggressor. President Trump is attempting to silence the voices of the 17 women who have come forward to accuse him of sexual misconduct."

More than 100 members of Congress had called for an investigation into allegations against Trump as

of Tuesday. Trump has denied the allegations, dismissing them as "fake news" in a tweet on Tuesday. Some members of the House and Senate have gone so far as to call for the president's resignation in the face of the allegations. (Abbie Bennett, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 12/12/17)

Flooding Grants

With Bertie County and the Town of Windsor still in recovery mode from two major flooding events in September and October of last year, a trio of grants helped to lift holiday spirits last week. Last week's announcement of \$2.75 million in Golden LEAF Foundation funds will be used to help construct a joint facility to serve Bertie County Cooperative Extension and a library, both flooded last year by back-to-back tropical systems. Thursday, the Golden LEAF Foundation's Board of Directors approval of additional disaster recovery funds in the amount of \$2,750,000 for the library and cooperative extension joint-use facility, \$240,000 for the Teacher Housing Initiative, and receive \$311,720 to replace a Windsor pump station damaged by flooding.

At its meeting on Dec. 7 the Golden LEAF Foundation allocated a total of \$14,347,101 in Disaster Recovery Program funding for 22 applications with appropriations from the NC General Assembly following last year's hurricane and tropical storms. In June, the Golden LEAF Foundation approved the first two grants for Bertie County, including \$72,707 to study the Cashie River Drainage Basin through a research project with NC State University; and a \$500,000 grant to support planning, engineering and design of a joint-use facility for co-location of the public library and cooperative extension offices.

Additionally, the county has previously received a \$300,000 state grant coupled with \$284,299 in FEMA funds to assist in replacing EMS Station One that was severely flooded at its downtown Windsor location during Mother Nature's one-two punch 14 months ago. That station has been operating at a temporary location since the floodwaters rose last year. (ROANOKE-CHOWAN NEWS-HERALD, 12/12/17)

Tillis Staff

Senator Thom Tillis announced Tuesday that Kim Canady Barnes will serve as his next State Director and Luke Blanchat will serve as his Deputy State Director. Barnes will be replacing current State Director Jordan Shaw, who was recently named as Executive Vice President for the consulting firm OnMessage Inc. Barnes has served as Senator Tillis' Deputy State Director since he took office in 2015, and has managed the Senator's regional office in Raleigh, responsible for overseeing casework and correspondence with federal agencies to assist North Carolinians. Blanchat has served as Senator Tillis' Director of Economic Development, based out of the Senator's regional office in Charlotte. Blanchat previously served as Senator Tillis' special adviser in his Washington, D.C. office. (NEWS RELEASE, 12/12/17)

Charter School

Leaders of an embattled Durham charter school that's trying to rebuild its image after improperly awarding diplomas to 40 percent of its graduates say they might ask for state permission to reopen the high school program in a few years. The State Board of Education voted in March to order Kestrel Heights Charter School to close its high school program after the school determined that 160 of 395 students since 2008 had been given diplomas they hadn't earned. Kestrel was allowed to remain open as a K-8 school but was told it couldn't ask to restart its high school program for at least three years. The closing of the high school left Kestrel with a building that it's not using but is still paying off. Mark Tracy, Kestrel's executive director, told the N.C. Charter Schools Advisory Board on Tuesday that requesting permission to reopen the high school is "definitely an option on the table."

But most of Tracy's focus was on giving an update on Kestrel, including presenting an audit that found no significant current problems with the school. Tracy thanked the advisory board for taking a risk by not recommending that the entire charter school close. As a charter school, Kestrel is a taxpayer-funded public school that's free of some of the rules and regulations that traditional public schools must follow. But the diploma issue put Kestrel under greater state scrutiny, including more

frequent appearances before the charter schools advisory board.

Kestrel now has 563 students, and 200 fewer K-8 students than a year ago. Tracy said marketing the school is difficult because it will take some time to overcome Kestrel's "negative stigma." But advisory board members praised Kestrel's efforts over the last several months. Alex Quigley, chairman of the advisory board, said the diploma issue Kestrel faced wasn't an isolated incident because it's also happened at traditional public schools. (T. Keung Hui, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 12/12/17)

Mecklenburg Hack

A foreign-based hacker gained access to at least one government employee's computer network log-in ID to launch a "ransomware" attack last week in Mecklenburg County, officials said Tuesday. The cyber-attack knocked multiple data servers and many public services offline and caused widespread outages across Mecklenburg County systems. The county's "IT (information technology) Incident Response Team" first learned of the problem early in the morning of Dec. 5, said IT chief, Keith Gregg. By mid-morning, the county began shutting down parts of its network to isolate damage. A week later, 17 of 200 affected systems have been restored, Gregg said. Those include the court system's jury management application, an employee payroll platform and several programs at the Department of Social Services. The incident is still an active "cybercrime scene," Gregg said Tuesday. The county has hired a cyber forensics firm, called Fortalice Solutions, to assist with recovery, investigation and network restoration. So far, Gregg said, there's no evidence that the affected data has been stolen or redistributed by the person or people who hacked into the county's network of computers. The incident primarily revolved around a "ransomware" attack that consists of a hacker breaking into a system, blocking use of data and demanding money in exchange for restoring access. (Anna Douglas, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, 12/12/17)

Pipeline Approval

A panel of Virginia regulators has granted a conditional permit for the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline contingent on getting more information about the project's water quality impacts. The Virginia State Water Control Board voted 4-3 Tuesday to approve a key Clean Water Act permit. The board is charged with determining whether there is "reasonable assurance" water along the route won't be contaminated during construction. Department of Environmental Quality spokesman Bill Hayden says the permit won't take effect until several additional studies are reviewed and approved by the department. They include soil and erosion control plans and stormwater management plans. Pipeline spokesman Aaron Ruby says the company is evaluating some of the additional conditions and will have a full statement later Tuesday. Many opponents characterized the decision as a partial victory. (THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 12/12/17)

Council Streams

The Charlotte City Council next month will consider whether to resume televising its pre-meeting citizen comment sessions -- a practice halted after meetings were disrupted last spring. Newly elected at-large member Braxton Winston favors the change. At Monday's meeting, he took matters into his own hands by streaming the forum live from the dais. Charlotte residents traditionally have had 30 minutes before meetings twice a month to address the council on whatever topics they choose. The sessions were televised and streamed on the Government Channel -- until last spring. The council moved the forum to a smaller room -- and off video -- after a couple of meetings erupted in chaos amid protests over police shootings and immigration.

The forums returned to the council chamber in October, but they're still not televised. So on Monday afternoon, new council member Braxton Winston promised to do something about that. "As of right now, the public forum will not be broadcast, but we will surely try to live stream that. It's a little different from the dais, but we're going to work it out," he said in a Facebook video. And so he did. The video and audio weren't broadcast quality, but Winston made his point. Winston brought up the TV issue at the council's dinner meeting beforehand and said he planned to seek a council vote. Newly-elected Mayor Vi Lyles stepped in and said she would put it on a future agenda. A city

spokesman says the council is tentatively scheduled to consider the change at its January 8th meeting. (David Boraks, WFAE NEWS, 12/12/17)

Interstate 74

Congressman Robert Pittenger is leading bipartisan efforts to upgrade Highway 74 into a modern interstate connecting Charlotte, Wilmington, and the challenged communities of southeastern North Carolina. "Highway 74 connects the economic and transportation assets in Charlotte with the port in Wilmington. In between are many challenged rural communities hit hard by international trade agreements and the loss of traditional industries," explained Pittenger. "By upgrading Highway 74 to an interstate, we can attract new businesses to these rural communities who would benefit from North Carolina's pro-business policies, dedicated workforce, and the easy access to both Charlotte and Wilmington."

"This idea is still in the conceptual stage. My goal is to work with local leaders on building support to move from idea to reality," said Congressman Pittenger. "Charlotte-Douglas is building out a major intermodal transportation facility that will be key to creating new jobs in the region. Connecting Charlotte's intermodal, Wilmington's port, and the workforce in Monroe, Wadesboro, Rockingham, Laurinburg, and many southeastern North Carolina communities would spark major economic growth." (THE BLADEN JOURNAL, 12/12/17)

Whooping Cough

The health department has identified 29 cases of whooping cough in Henderson County, up from the 21 it reported Dec. 8. Pardee UNC Health Care announced Tuesday that it has implemented visitor restrictions in response to the whooping cough outbreak and flu season. Park Ridge Health implemented visitor restrictions late last week. About 1,000 people in schools and the community have been identified as having close contact with someone who has pertussis, the Henderson County Department of Public Health says.

Pertussis is a serious respiratory infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis* and is especially dangerous for infants, pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems, Pardee officials said in a news release. Like the flu, it is spread by droplets released when coughing, sneezing or talking. Symptoms include sneezing, runny nose, mild cough, low-grade fever (five to 10 days, up to 21 days), and coughing fits followed by vomiting and difficulty breathing. People with pertussis can be infectious for up to 21 days without symptoms and the illness can last for months. Antibiotic treatment given early may decrease the duration and severity of cough and reduce transmission. Antibiotics are likely less effective in reducing symptoms in later phases of the infection. Vaccination is the best way to prevent pertussis infection. (HENDERSONVILLE TIMES-NEWS, 12/11/17)

Opioid Fight

Randolph County could be taking legal action against manufacturers and distributors of prescription opioids coming into the county. County Manager Hal Johnson said the Opioid Advisory Council decided at its Dec. 6 meeting to recommend to commissioners that the county take such action due to the opioid crisis. The number of overdose victims has increased to the point that Randolph's per capita figures are comparable to Mecklenburg, the largest-population county in the state. He said any legal actions taken would be based on damage done to local citizens, including the number of overdose deaths, responses to overdose victims by Emergency Services and other impacts. Johnson stressed that the action would not be part of a class action suit but would "look at damages just to Randolph County." He said he would talk in more detail about the possible legal action at the commissioners' Jan. 2 meeting when the Opioid Advisory Council makes its recommendations. (Larry Penkava, ASHEBORO COURIER-TRIBUNE, 12/12/17)

Named

Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler named Andrea Ashby of Raleigh as the new director of the Public Affairs Division. Ashby replaces Brian Long, who accepted a position with the N.C. Community College System. Ashby has worked 22 years with the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Public Affairs Division. The Public Affairs Division is the department's central communication arm. The office serves as the press office for the annual N.C. State Fair, publishes the monthly Agricultural Review newspaper and manages the Century Farm program. (NEWS RELEASE, 12/12/17)

Training Center

The relationship between the Stanly County Airport and the N.C. Air National Guard has paid fruitful dividends. Accompanied by local, state and federal dignitaries North Carolina Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey and N.C. Air National Guard Col. Michael "Troy" Gerock announced Thursday a partnership between the Guard and the Office of State Fire Marshal to establish a state emergency training center at the Stanly County Airport, which will be the second such facility in the nation.

The Stanly County Airport NCANG facility was chosen as the site for the new emergency training center for several reasons: It has a burn building, confined space, trench rescue and structural collapse training facility needed for this type of specialized training. It is also centrally located and sits near various types of terrain needed for training -- lakes, the Rocky River, Morrow Mountain State Park and the Uwharrie National Forest. A FEMA warehouse is nearby and the site is close to the state's largest city, Charlotte. "This new emergency training center offers many opportunities for our state," Causey said in a press release. "It will spark economic growth to the region as well as provide specialized training for our emergency responders to keep our residents better protected." (THE STANLY NEWS & PRESS, 12/12/17)

Hired

The North Carolina Retail Merchants Association has hired Korey Kiger as assistant director of government relations. Kiger most recently served as the policy advisor to Rep. John Szoka, R-Cumberland. Prior to that, Kiger served in several roles around state government including at the N.C. State Board of Elections and the N.C. Supreme Court. Kiger also serves in the North Carolina Army National Guard as a second lieutenant in military intelligence, where he is a platoon leader. (NEWS RELEASE, 12/12/17)

Edgecombe Jobs

Edgecombe County is about to get an economic shot in the arm with announcements over the next several days of new jobs coming to the struggling county. Gov. Roy Cooper is scheduled to visit Edgecombe twice in a week to share news about the nearly 1,000 new jobs for a county that has the second highest unemployment rate in the state and has experienced an exodus of residents in recent years. State officials on Wednesday are expected to announce plans by an optical fiber company to relocate to Edgecombe, bringing about 150 new jobs to the region. Officials have not publicly disclosed the name of the firm although the Department of Commerce Economic Investment Committee is set to consider and approve state incentives Wednesday to spur the company's relocation.

Several sources also told WRAL News that another job announcement is scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 19, with news of an unnamed Chinese tire maker with plans to invest more than a half-billion dollars to produce upwards of 800 jobs. This would be the first major tenant at the Kingsboro megasite off the U.S. Highway 64 bypass in Edgecombe. The location has 1,500 acres near the freeway. State and local officials declined to talk publicly about either announcement until after incentive deals are signed. (WRAL NEWS, 12/12/17)

Winston-Salem Bonds

A citizens panel is recommending that Winston-Salem put \$120 million in bonds before city voters to take care of needs ranging from economic development to streets and sidewalks. If the Winston-

Salem City Council takes the next step, residents of the city could be voting on money for the improvements in the fall of 2018. The bond vote would be the second in four years, following a 2014 bond package that totaled \$132.9 million, but even so, Glenn Orr, the chairman of the Citizens' Capital Needs Committee, said there were \$630 million in total requests to winnow down to the ones the committee values most. Orr told the Finance Committee of the Winston-Salem City Council on Monday that the group came up with its \$120 million amount by limiting any tax increase to 4 cents on the tax rate. Winston-Salem currently has a tax rate of 59.74 cents for every \$100 of taxable property. With a 4-cent increase, the owner of a \$150,000 property would see a tax bill increase of \$60, from \$896.10 to \$956.10. As in 2014, the committee is recommending five categories of bonds that people would vote on. By far the largest is \$56 million for streets and sidewalks, followed by \$24 million in parks and recreation. Public-safety bonds would total \$18.5 million, and \$12 million in economic development bonds would be proposed. There would be about \$9.7 million in housing development bonds proposed. (Wesley Young, WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL, 12/12/17)

Teacher Pay Proposal

Longtime teachers in Cumberland County who have seen little pay increases from the state in recent years will get raises in their local supplemental pay if the Board of Education approves a salary proposal Tuesday. About 2,700 of the school system's 6,042 employees will get raises averaging about 10 percent under the plan, according to Ruben A. Reyes, associate superintendent for human resources. Local funds would pay for about \$4.98 million of the \$8.1 million cost, with state and federal funds paying for the rest, he said in an email statement. Reyes said the proposal represents the single largest salary adjustment in the school system's history. Board Chairman Greg West said the proposal is based on a salary study. "We realized a lot of our people had worked a long time without raises after the recession," he said. "This should make Cumberland County Schools a more attractive and competitive place to work." (Steve DeVane, THE FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER, 12/11/17)

Beach Park

After two years of discussion, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation has a plan for expanding the mainland portion of Hammocks Beach State Park that includes a campground and cabins, public gathering space and hiking trails, additional kayak launch space and updates at the visitor center to include the site's history as a park for African Americans during segregation. The plan was released Tuesday. "This plan incorporates the complex needs of multiple stakeholders in a way that will serve the community and visitors well," N.C. State Parks Director Mike Murphy said in a statement. "It offers a great balance for the future of the park: ample opportunities for recreation, new spaces to bring people together, and protection of important natural communities."

When it opened in 1961, Hammocks Beach State Park was designed for use by African Americans, who were barred at the time from other public facilities. Following the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, all N.C. state parks were opened to all people. The main feature of Hammocks Beach State Park is the three-mile-long Bear Island, an undeveloped barrier island accessible by kayak or by a ferry that docks near the park's visitors center. The park also includes Huggins and Jones islands. Hammocks Beach State Park had more than 195,000 visitors in 2016, the state says, and visitation is ahead of that pace for 2017. (Martha Quillin, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 12/12/17)

School Closings

For the second time in six months, the Burke County Board of Education has voted to close an aging school building. After deciding to shutter 82-year-old Chesterfield Elementary School in June, the board opted to take the same path with 88-year-old Rutherford College Elementary School. The unanimous vote came at a special-called meeting to address the building Monday evening at the Olive Hill Resource Center in Morganton. The students will be reassigned to Valdese Elementary School for the 2018-19 school year. The decision came after parents and community members in Rutherford College spoke in favor of keeping open the school at a public meeting last week. Subsequently, many wrote letters to the board afterward to make the same request. Each board member spoke to the difficulty of making the hard decision. The culmination of the decision on Rutherford College came after a more than two-year process where the school system analyzed its

oldest buildings and then received two follow-up letters from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction on the state of Rutherford College. Following that department's recommendation, the school system had an extensive study done by architects and engineers from three different firms in August. The outcome of the inspection was the recommendation of more than \$5.5 million in renovations at the school. (Justin Epley, MORGANTON NEWS-HERALD, 12/12/17)

Veterans Parking

Veterans will soon have their own special parking spaces at all Nash County government buildings. To recognize the heroic nature of all veterans and the actions of Purple Heart recipients, the Nash County Board of Commissioners is purchasing signs to mark parking spaces as reserved for veterans. The signs are a way to show appreciation and respect to veterans, said Rick Thomason, senior vice commandant of the mideast division of the Department of North Carolina Marine Corps League. The League, the only federally chartered Corps-related veterans organization in existence, perpetuates the traditions and spirit of Marines, according to information from the organization. The League has sold 130 signs to be placed by local governments in towns and cities across the state. The signs have a QR code that can lead veterans to a website with information about available services. The group offers signs for veterans and signs designed for recipients of the Purple Heart. The signs cost \$20 each and will be installed by county staff. (Lindell John Kay, ROCKY MOUNT TELEGRAM, 12/11/17)

New Appointments

Gov. Roy Cooper announced 53 new appointments to various state boards and commissions on Tuesday. "I'm grateful that this talented group North Carolinians will serve our people and our state in these new appointments," Gov. Cooper said. The following appointments were announced:

- **NCWorks Commission:** Kevin Trapani; Stan Sherrill; Pamela B. Townsend; Kimberly Toler; Sergi Roura; Susan Jackson; Jeffrey Frederick; Pastor Nathaniel Davis, Jr.; MaryBe McMillan; Dr. Hope Williams; Mayor Shawn Brown of Claremont
- **Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina:** Gene McLaurin
- **Golden L.E.A.F. Inc. Board of Directors:** Thomas F. Taft, Sr.
- **Parole Commission:** Eric Montgomery
- **Historical Commission:** David Ruffin
- **North Carolina Partnership for Children Board of Directors:** Dr. Becky Simpkin
- **Juvenile Jurisdiction Advisory Committee:** Krista Hiatt; Carol Cecus McManus
- **USS North Carolina Battleship Commission:** Christopher Boney; Spence Broadhurst; Keith Mason; Michael Bradshaw; Leslie Noble; Nina Hill; Charles Carpenter; Donald Britt; Wilma Daniels; Laura Padgett; Margaret Dickson; Alexander Wilson; Norwood Bryan; Deirdre McGlone-Webb; Judge Sandra Ray; Jack Wilson
- **North Carolina Zoological Park Council:** Craven Rand; Deborah Ponder; Emma Allen; Deborah Noel
- **North Carolina Geographic Information Coordinating Council:** Steven Averett; Kathryn Clifton; Scott Lokken; Alex Rankin; Paul Badr; Jason Hedley; Lee Worsley; Debbie Joyner
- **Bald Head Island Transportation Authority:** Susan Rabon
- **Global Transpark Authority:** David Howard; Jack Best; Wanda Proffitt; Norris Tolson; Anuj Mittal; Tom Hendrickson
- **Governor's Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education:** Nick Sojka

(NEWS RELEASE, 12/12/17)

Legislative Studies and Meetings

Items in **RED** are new listings.

LB: Legislative Building

LOB: Legislative Office Building.

More Information: <http://ncleg.net/LegislativeCalendar/>

Wednesday, Dec. 13

- 9 a.m. | The Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services, Subcommittee on Aging, 643 LOB.
- 10 a.m. | The Joint Legislative Task Force on Education Finance Reform (2017), 544 LOB.
- 1 p.m. | The Senate Select Committee on Judicial Reform and Redistricting, 1124/1224 LB.
- 1 p.m. | The Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Capital Improvements, 544 LOB.
- 1 p.m. | The Environmental Review Commission, 643 LOB.
- 2 p.m. | House Select Committee on Implementation of Building Code Regulatory Reform, 1425 LB.

Thursday, Dec. 14

- 9 a.m. | The Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Information Technology, 423 LOB.
- 9 a.m. | The Joint Legislative Emergency Management Oversight Committee, 643 LOB.
- 10:30 a.m. | The Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety, Subcommittee on ABC Permitting & Enforcement, 414 LOB.

Friday, Dec. 15

- 10 a.m. | Joint Legislative Elections Oversight Committee Meeting, 643 LOB.

Monday, Jan. 8

- **1 p.m. | House Select Committee on Strategic Transportation Planning and Long Term Funding Solutions, 544 LOB.**

Tuesday, Jan. 9

- 1 p.m. | NOTE: DATE CHANGE - The Joint Legislative Commission on Energy Policy, 544 LOB.

Wednesday, Jan. 10

- 12 p.m. | House Session, House Chamber.
- 12 p.m. | Senate Session, Senate Chamber.

Thursday Jan. 11

- **9 a.m. | The Joint Legislative Transportation Oversight Committee, 643 LOB.**

Wednesday, Jan. 17

- 10 a.m. | Child Fatality Task Force Meeting, 1027/1128 LB.

Wednesday, Jan. 24

- 10 a.m. | Child Fatality Task Force Meeting, 1027/1128 LB.

Tuesday, Feb. 6

- 10 a.m. | Child Fatality Task Force Meeting, 1027/1128 LB.

Tuesday, Feb. 13

- 10 a.m. | Child Fatality Task Force Meeting, 1027/1128 LB.

N.C. Government Meetings and Hearings

Items in **RED** are new listings.

Wednesday, Dec. 13

- 9 a.m. | The State Water Infrastructure Authority meets, North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, 4021 Carya Dr., Raleigh.
- 9 a.m. | The State Licensing Board for General Contractors hold public hearing on proposed rule changes, 5400 Creedmoor Rd, Raleigh.
- 10 a.m. | The NC Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission meets, 400 East Tryon Road, Raleigh.
- 1 p.m. | The Economic Investment Committee meets, N.C. Commerce Executive Board Room located on the fourth floor, 301 N. Wilmington St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Dec. 14

- 9 a.m. | The Board of Directors of the North Carolina State Ports Authority meets, Board Room of the North Carolina Maritime Building, 2202 Burnett Blvd., Wilmington.
- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Wednesday, Dec. 20

- **1 p.m. | The N.C. Plant Conservation Scientific Committee meets, N.C. Botanical Garden, Old Mason Farm Road, Chapel Hill.**
- 6 p.m. | The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries hold public hearing on proposed shellfish leases in Carteret County, N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' Central District Office, 5285 Highway 70 West, Morehead City.

Thursday, Dec. 21

- 10 a.m. | The state Industrial Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Room 240, 2nd Floor, Department of Insurance's Albemarle Building, 325 North Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Jan. 4

- 6 p.m. | The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries hold a public hearing on proposed shellfish leases in New Hanover County, N.C. Department of Environmental Quality Regional Office, 127 Cardinal Drive Extension, Wilmington.

Tuesday, Jan. 9

- 6 p.m. | The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries will hold a public hearing on proposed shellfish leases in Onslow County, North Topsail Beach Town Center, 2008 Loggerhead Court, North Topsail Beach.
- 7 p.m. | The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Bladen Community College Auditorium, 7418 NC HWY 41W, Dublin.

Wednesday, Jan. 10

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.
- 7 p.m. | The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Old Alamance County Courthouse, 1 SE Court Square, Graham.

Thursday, Jan. 11

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.
- 7 p.m. | The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Stanly County Agri-Civic Center, 26032 Newt Road, Albemarle.

Tuesday, Jan. 16

- 7 p.m. | The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Haywood Community College , 185 Freelander Drive, Clyde.

Wednesday, Jan. 17

- 7 p.m. | The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Western Piedmont Community College, Moore Hall Leviton Auditorium, 1001 Burkemont Ave., Morganton.

Thursday, Jan. 18

- 7 p.m. | The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Elkin High School, 334 Elk Spur Street, Elkin.

Tuesday, Jan. 23

- 7 p.m. | The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, John A. Holmes High School Auditorium, 600 Woodard St., Edenton.

Wednesday, Jan. 24

- 7 p.m. | The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Craven Community College, 800 College Court, New Bern.

Thursday, Jan. 25

- 7 p.m. | The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Nash Community College, 522 N Old Carriage Road, Rocky Mount.

UNC Board of Governors

Board Room of the UNC Center for School Leadership Development
140 Friday Center Drive, Chapel Hill (**remote meeting locations in RED**)
More Information: <https://www.northcarolina.edu/bog/schedule.php>

Wednesday, Dec. 13

- 9 a.m. | Committee on Personnel and Tenure, C.S.L.D. Building, Room 119, Chapel Hill.
- 10 a.m. | Task Force on Size, Scope, and Purpose of UNC General Administration, C.S.L.D. Building, Room 128, Chapel Hill.

Friday, Dec. 15

- 2:30 p.m. | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Friday, Jan. 26, 2018

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Friday, March 23, 2018

- TBA | UNC Wilmington, Wilmington.

Friday, May 25, 2018

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

N.C. Utilities Commission Hearing Schedule

Dobbs Building
430 North Salisbury Street
Raleigh, North Carolina

More Information: <http://www.ncuc.commerce.state.nc.us/activities/activit.htm>

Monday, Dec. 18

- Staff Conference

Tuesday, Jan. 2

- Staff Conference

N.C. Dept. of Environmental Quality

The N.C. Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources has a new name - the N.C. Dept. of Environmental Quality. More Information: <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/guest/home>

Wednesday, Dec. 13

- 9 a.m. | The State Consumer and Family Advisory Committee (SCFAC) meets, Dix Grill, 1101 Cafeteria Dr., Raleigh.

Other Meetings and Events of Interest

Items in **RED** are new listings.

Wednesday, Dec. 13

- 9 a.m. | Gov. Cooper and Secretary Cohen join Statewide Organizations to host Affordable Care Act Press Conference, Alliance Medical Ministry, 101 Donald Ross Dr., Raleigh.
- **12 p.m. | Gov. Cooper to visit the Princeville AmeriCorps NCCC program, 101 Rainey Street, Princeville.**
- **1:30 p.m. | Gov. Cooper to make an economic development announcement, Edgecombe Community College, 2009 West Wilson Street, Tarboro.**

Wednesday, Jan. 3

- 10 a.m. | The 16th Annual Economic Forecast Forum, Sheraton Imperial Hotel & Convention Center, 4700 Emperor Blvd, Durham.

Monday, March 19

- TBD | The N.C. Chamber hold annual meeting, Raleigh Marriott Crabtree Valley, 4500 Marriott Dr, Raleigh.

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